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MAY 10 1938

Bulletin of The Detroit Institute of Arts of the City of Detroit



CRUCIFIXION
FLORENTINE SCHOOL, DATED 1351

Vol. XVII

MAY, 1938

No. 8

A PAINTING FROM THE MARCHES

The museum has acquired as the gift of Mr. P. de Boer of Amsterdam a late Gothic panel painting of *St. John Baptist* by a rather rare and interesting artist of the Marches, Lorenzo da San Severino (Lorenzo Salimbeni) the Elder, (Fig. 1).¹ As the painting hangs among our other Italian pictures, it strikes a somewhat unusual note both by the delicacy of its color and the odd charm of its expression. It represents the fierce, fanatical dreamer from the Syrian desert as a slender, frail young figure who looks out from his golden niche with wide, melancholy eyes, like those of some shy little animal one might find in the woods. It is a curious and appealing face; and its attraction is reinforced by the delicacy of the color. The saint's robe is a pale apple green. Over his shoulders is a gold-bordered, wine-colored cloak, whose interior is azure blue. The three luminous colors against the ruddy gold background form a harmony which points to an original and sensitive talent.

Lorenzo Salimbeni was called Lorenzo da San Severino from his birthplace, a little town in the valley of the Potenza, which flows down the eastern face of the Apennines to the Adriatic. He was born in 1374, worked in the little towns of the Marches with his younger brother, Jacopo, and died sometime before 1420. His oeuvre has been reconstructed² around three dated works of 1400, 1404 and 1416: a triptych in the museum, and a fresco in the Misericordia, of his native town; and a series of frescoes of the life of St. John Baptist in the church of S. Giovanni Battista in Urbino, which are signed by Lorenzo and his brother Jacopo. The early works



FIG. 1: ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST
BY LORENZO DA SAN SEVERINO THE ELDER
GIFT OF P. DE BOER

are quite naïf in feeling, and show the influence not only of North Italian but even of German Gothic painting in their elaborately calligraphic drapery, in certain of their types, and in their sweet, languid



FIG. 2: LORENZO DA SAN SEVERINO: SS. LAWRENCE, NICOLAS OF TOLENTINO, PETER AND PAUL. PESARO, MUSEO CIVICO

sentiment. The Detroit panel stands in point of style between these early works and the frescoes in Urbino. The later frescoes are, on the other hand, brilliant graceful examples of the late Gothic narrative style which is often called the International Style. They are part, that is to say, of the current of ornamental, cheerful, courtly and poetic Gothic painting, which flowed through the art of all western Europe and formed the final flowering of the mediaeval age. The most famous names of the movement in Italy are Gentile da Fabriano, who like Lorenzo came from the Marches, and Pisanello in northern Italy. The pageantry and poetic gayety of the chivalric spirit found its expression also in the San Severini, who were contemporaries and kindred spirits rather than followers of the more famous Gentile da Fabriano. Both, in fact, derive from the tradition of painting founded in the Marches a half a century earlier by Alegretto Nuzi, whose bland and richly ornamental art is represented

by a triptych in our museum. Alegretto Nuzi worked in Fabriano but also in Florence and Venice. Gentile da Fabriano worked all through the peninsula from Brescia and Venice to Rome. Lorenzo da San Severino stayed in the hill towns of the Marches where his work is mostly to be found today and is consequently less well known.

In the Italy of modern travel the towns where he worked seem very remote. They have seemed so only since the coming of railroads, for from the time of the Carthaginian invasions until less than a century ago a traveled highway from the Alps to Rome ran through them. The Romans drove their great north road, the Flaminian Way, along the still more ancient route which led up the valley of the Tiber to Terni, then over the low hills to the Clitumnus valley, to Spoleto and Foligno, which lie at the farther end of the lovely valley one sees stretching southward into the sun from the rock of Assisi. From Foligno the

road went over the Apennines and down through the mountain valley of the Marches to the Adriatic, and thence north to Rimini and the plain of the Po. Until the age of steam the traveler from the north to Rome was as likely to go by this route (taking in Loreto on his way) as to go down the more familiar route through Tuscany. Urbino, Fabriano and San Severino were thus on a main artery of north-south travel and their art shows the influences of the moving stream. The painting of the Marches began as an offshoot of Florentine painting. But one finds in it traces of the delicacy and calligraphic grace of the French Gothic painters, of the angularity and dreamy sentiment of the Germans, mingled with the grandeur of Tuscan Gothic and the native cheerfulness of the Italian hills. It is a charming phase of Italian art, not as yet well enough represented in this country. There are two panels by Lorenzo da San Severino, the Elder, in the Walters Gallery, Baltimore.³ The

new panel in Detroit is a pleasant addition to the small number of his works in America.

In the museum of Pesaro are four panels representing SS. Lawrence, Nicolas of Tolentino, Paul and Peter (Fig. 2), which seem from the photograph closely related to our panel.⁴ The Detroit picture has been cut down at the sides and bottom, so that it is impossible to compare measurements. But the shape of the trefoiled tops, the tooling of the haloes, the placing of the saints' names, as well as the style of the figures, are identical in all five panels. It is true that the St. John stands upon conventionalized rocks and the other four saints upon flat ground. But the *St. John*, if not from the same altarpiece, must be from the same period and the same hand as the Pesaro panels, which are attributed both by Berenson and Van Marle to Lorenzo da San Severino.

E. P. RICHARDSON

1. Panel, H. 30, W. 11 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches. Accession number 37.153.

2. A. Colasanti in *Bollettino d'Arte*, IV (1910), p. 409; A. Venturi, *Storia dell'Arte italiana*, VII, p. 173; Van Marle, *Italian Schools of Painting*, VIII, p. 212 ff.

3. Berenson—*Italian Pictures of the Renaissance*, p. 304.

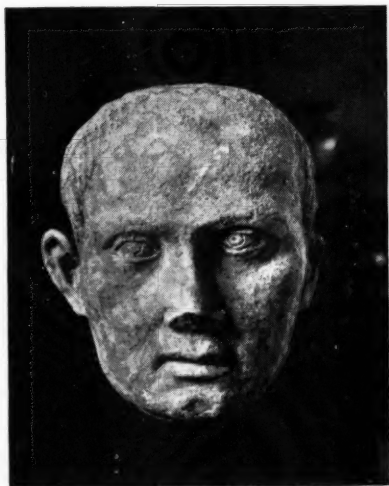
4. I have to thank Sig. G. Pacchioni of Ancona for courteously supplying me with the photograph.

THREE ROMAN PORTRAIT HEADS

For years the Roman collection of the museum has been distinguished by a small but fine collection of four portrait heads. During the past year the group has been nearly doubled and made considerably more representative by the acquisition of three additional portraits. In point of time, these sculptured likenesses embrace the 500 years that saw the rise and decline of Roman portrait art. Considered individually, they illustrate three distinct chapters in Roman portrait history, two of them

heretofore unrepresented in our collection.

Before the 1st century B.C. there existed at Rome a portrait tradition of Etruscan lineage, but this portraiture as we know it from contemporary references was a craft of realistic wax mask-making which was important to the semi-religious Roman custom of ancestor commemoration. The innate taste of the Romans for realistic likenesses flowered into an art of the first magnitude only when it was fertilized



PORTRAIT OF A MAN
ROMAN, 1ST CENTURY B. C.
GIFT OF MR. AND MRS. EDGAR B. WHITCOMB

by the brilliant portrait tradition of Hellenistic Greece. The frank realism and prevailing sobriety of Roman portraiture remained unshaken by the impact of this declining culture of the eastern Mediterranean world, but the simple plastic forms, the faultless technique, the fully developed conception of the portrait were the heritage of the Greek past.

The earliest of the lately-acquired portrait sculptures, which is the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edgar B. Whitcomb, is a terra cotta head of a man of the 1st century B.C., the subject is a simple, sober citizen of Republican Rome, whose clear-eyed and almost naively honest countenance, whose clean-shaven face and close cropped hair are indicative of the strong and healthy society to which he belonged. Here the generalized forms of the Hellenistic style mingle with the honest and trenchant realism inherent in the Roman nature. Absolute faithfulness to the original model was the ideal of the Republican sculptor and to achieve a "speaking likeness" the artist has deliberately

parted the lips and represented the iris and pupil of the eye by lines incised with his modelling stick. Quite in keeping with the simple and prosaic conception of the head is the rather inelegant medium of coarse terra-cotta, which had been a favorite material of the earlier Etruscans. Like the well-known terra-cotta head in Boston, it is not impossible that the portrait was based upon a mask taken from life.

None of this stark honesty, this peasant-like plainness of the Republican era is to be found in the portrait head of a woman, which is the gift of Mr. P. Nesi. The portrait dates from the beginning of the 3rd century A.D., in the reign of the Emperor Septimius Severus. The over-indulgence of the court, the enervating atmosphere of imperial Rome, have left an unmistakable stamp upon the countenance of this patrician lady. We are impressed by the satin smoothness of her soft flesh, the dull languid gaze that fills her heavy-lidded eyes, the expression of complacent self-satisfaction playing about her full lipped sensual mouth. But nothing about the portrait is more indicative of the decadence of Roman life under Septimius Severus than the amazing convention of her coiffure. Under the influence of the Empress, Julia Domna, a Syrian princess, sculptors were wont to flatter the vanity of Roman women by carving for their portraits removable wigs of contrasting stone. By this vain conceit, a lady could keep her sculptured likeness abreast of the rapidly changing styles in hair arrangement by simply ordering a new stone wig! If the rather unhealthy softness and emphatic sensuality of the face, if the weary expression as well as the sensational novelty of the coiffure bear witness to the internal decay of Rome, there was as yet no falling off in the quality of portrait sculpture.

It was not until the middle of the 3rd century, that the obvious decay of the tradition set in. The decline of Roman portrait art was swift. The realistic individuality which had characterized the art since its beginning was almost entirely obscured as the declining culture of Rome fell easy prey to fresh influences from the East. These new stylistic principles of strict symmetry and frontality, of forms translated into decorative conventions were fatal to vigorous, convincing portraiture.

This last chapter of Roman portrait art is well expressed in the marble head of an emperor of the 4th century, which is the gift of Dr. Valentiner. The hair of this small portrait is reduced to a series of coarsely cut lines, the simple convention of the eyes results in a

blank stare, while the subtle planes of the human face are represented by the simplest rounded surfaces. Indeed the features are so reduced to a mere formal pattern that it is impossible to identify with certainty the ruler whose office is established by his imperial crown. The portrait remotely resembles other likenesses of the Emperor Valentinianus I, who ruled in the second half of the 4th century. The five small holes around the upper edge of the crown were no doubt used to fasten a bronze wreath to the head.

The portrait heads of the Republican period of the 3rd century are on exhibition at Alger House. The little 4th century head has been placed in the Roman gallery of the Institute.

PERRY T. RATHBONE

A CRUCIFIXION OF THE GIOTTO SCHOOL

The museum has added a truly remarkable work of the Giotto school to its collections: a *Crucifixion* dated 1351 (reproduced on the cover), a composition of great simplicity and extremely intense expression. The delicate colour combinations, mostly of pink and dark blue, remind us of the school of Siena and even of Rimini, while the style of the figures points to Florence. The painting is probably by the same hand which executed the remarkable diptych of which one wing is in the National Gallery in London, the other in the Lehman collection in New York, a work greatly admired for its intense feeling, and either attributed to the Sienese school, or, with better reasons, to the immediate followers of Giotto. This artist is, accord-

ing to L. Venturi, closely related to the master of the touching *Pieta* in the Uffizi, one of the most impressive works of the Florentine school of the 14th Century, a work usually given to the mysterious "Giotto" or by others to Maso, the great artist whom Ghiberti praised above all the pupils of Giotto. The inscription on the lower part of our panel reads as follows:

HOC OP[VS] FEC[IT] FIERI
FRA[TER] LA[N]FRANCHINO
[DE] VALE[N]ZANO, CUI OPE[RE]
ATTVLIT DI[OMI]NA MARCHA
D[E] VGONIB[VS] MCCCLI

(This work was ordered by Frater Lanfranchino of Valenzano in 1351, whose work was supported by Donna Marcha de Ugonibus).

W. R. V.

EXHIBITIONS

Exhibition Galleries: THE FROBENIUS COLLECTION OF PREHISTORIC ROCK PICTURES, until May 16.

SEVENTH DETROIT INTERNATIONAL SALON OF PHOTOGRAPHY, May 31 to June 26.

Print Galleries: ETCHINGS, LITHOGRAPHS, AND WOODCUTS BY OUTSTANDING AMERICANS, until May 10.

PRINTS FROM THE INSTITUTE'S COLLECTION, throughout the summer.

Alger House: EXHIBITION OF GROSSE POINTE ARTISTS, until May 4.
EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS BY PAUL KLEE, May 8-June 12.

EVENTS

May			
Tuesday	3	2:00	Pageant of History Lecture: <i>The Romans</i> , Mrs. Heath.
		3:00	Short Talk: <i>The Frobenius Collection of Prehistoric Art</i> .
		8:30	Lecture: <i>Old Masters and New</i> , Mr. Richardson.
Wednesday	4	3:00	Short Talk: Same.
Thursday	5	3:00	Short Talk: Same.
		8:00	Lecture: <i>What to See in American Museums</i> , New York, John D. Morse.
Friday	6	3:00	Short Talk: Same.
		8:30	Lecture: <i>The House of the Stone and Bronze Age, A Review of the Latest Excavations</i> , Dr. Lechler.
Tuesday	10	3:00	Short Talk: <i>Silver by Paul Revere</i> .
Wednesday	11	3:00	Short Talk: Same.
Thursday	12	3:00	Short Talk: Same.
		8:00	Lecture: <i>What to See in American Museums</i> , Boston, Joyce Black.
Friday	13	3:00	Short Talk: Same.
Tuesday	17	2:00	Pageant of History: <i>Castles and Cathedrals of Europe</i> , Mrs. Heath.
		3:00	Short Talk: <i>Chinese Pottery</i> .
Wednesday	18	3:00	Short Talk: Same.
Thursday	19	3:00	Short Talk: Same.
		8:00	Lecture: <i>What to See in American Museums</i> , Washington, Baltimore, and Philadelphia, Joyce Black.
Friday	20	3:00	Short Talk: Same.
Tuesday	24	3:00	Short Talk: <i>Sculpture of Today</i> .
Wednesday	25	3:00	Short Talk: Same.
Thursday	26	3:00	Short Talk: Same.
		8:00	Lecture: <i>What to See in American Museums</i> , Chicago and the West, Mrs. Heath.
Friday	27	3:00	Short Talk: Same.
June			
Thursday	2	8:00	Lecture: <i>What to See in American Museums</i> , The Great Lakes Cities, John D. Morse.

APPOINTMENT TO THE STAFF

Parker Lesley has been appointed Assistant Art Curator in the Department of European Art following an open competition conducted by the Detroit Civil Service Commission which was held in key cities throughout the United States.

Mr. Lesley was born in Baltimore. After receiving his A.B. in Classical Literature at Stanford University in 1934, he completed his studies at Princeton University, where he was awarded a University Fellowship and the Charlotte Elizabeth Procter Fellowship in Art and Archaeology,

1936-38; Master of Fine Arts, Princeton, 1937. He was Carnegie Fellow at the Institut d'Art et d'Archéologie, University of Paris, in the summer of 1935 and a Fellow of the Committee for Relief in Belgium Foundation at the University of Brussels in the summer of 1937.

He has specialized in classical archaeology and medieval art. He has been a contributor to such scholarly publications as the *Art Bulletin*, published by the College Art Association, and *Art in America*.

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PUBLISHED MONTHLY, OCTOBER TO MAY INCLUSIVE, AT THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS OF THE CITY OF DETROIT. ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER AT THE POST OFFICE AT DETROIT, MICHIGAN, UNDER DATE OF OCTOBER 29, 1934. SUBSCRIPTION PRICE \$1.00 PER YEAR.

Educational Supplement to the Bulletin of The Detroit Institute of Arts

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SUMMER SCHOOL COURSE AND EXHIBITION AT THE INSTITUTE

A six-weeks' course in art history, sponsored by Wayne University and conducted by Adele Coulin Weibel, will be held in the lecture hall of the Detroit Institute of Arts, Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 1-3 p. m., beginning June 27th. The course, entitled "Great Epochs, Great Artists", will comprise the following lectures:

- 1-Civic Pride: Athens, Olympia
- 2-Empire Building: The Roman Frontier
- 3-Two Civilizations meet: Silk Trade
- 4-The Middleman: Sasanian Persia
- 5-The Conqueror: Mohammed and his Followers
- 6-The farthest North: Viking Art
- 7-The Crusades: Gothic Art
- 8-The Court of the Dukes of Burgundy
- 9-Italian Cities: Lucca, Venice
- 10-The Rise of Humanism: Florence
- 11-The Height of the Renaissance: Raffael
- 12-Northern Renaissance: Dürer, Cranach, Holbein
- 13-Democratic Art: Peter Bruegel
- 14-Protestant Art: Rembrandt
- 15-Counter Reformation: Tintoretto, El Greco
- 16-Two Civilizations blend: Chinoiserie

Also, as part of its affiliation with Wayne University, the Art Institute is lending its galleries for the annual exhibition of Wayne University Student Art, from May 17-30. Chosen by a jury of faculty members, the selections will encompass the past year's work in the various fields of art in the University curriculum. Craft work as well as painting, drawing, sculpture, wood-carving, industrial design, design, and commercial art will be included.